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ABSTRACT

Designed to improve reading skills of nonacademic high school juniors and to encourage positive attitudes toward racial and ethnic differences, an English and social studies core program was developed. Two groups of students, one of disabled readers and one of better but unmotivated readers, received one period of instruction in English and one in social studies four days each week while a reading specialist worked intensively with small groups of disabled readers. Teachers met for planning on the fifth day. Multilevel texts were used to gear material difficulty to student needs. Posttesting indicated that 60 percent of the students made significant gains in reading ability with significantly greater gains made by better readers. Student questionnaire responses indicated improved attitudes toward reading and individual differences. Teachers noted general reading improvement and lessening of racial and ethnic tensions. (Author/TO)

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Eleventh-Grade Core Program

Abstract

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Bibliography — Eleventh-Grade Core Program
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Purposes — To improve reading skills of non-academic high school juniors and encourage positive attitudes toward racial and ethnic differences.

Methods — Subjects were divided into one group of disabled readers and one group of better motivated readers based on individual informal reading inventory scores. Each group received one period of instruction in English and one in social studies four days each week while reading specialist worked intensively with small groups of disabled readers. Teachers met for planning on fifth day. Readabilities and multilevel texts were utilized to gear material difficulty to student needs.

Results and Conclusions — Post-testing indicated 60 per cent of all subjects made significant gains with significantly greater gains made by better readers. All disabled readers made gains but better unmotivated readers seemed to benefit most from homogeneous grouping. Student questionnaire responses indicated improved attitudes toward reading and individual differences. Teachers noted general reading improvement and lessening of racial and ethnic tensions.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY: ELEVENTH-GRADE CORE PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION: Meeting the needs of students in the "slow track" is a major concern of the comprehensive high school. The students involved are the most difficult to handle for they function at the periphery of the school and are usually in open conflict with teachers, administrators, and other students. Very few have definite goals or aspirations and by the junior year, inured to boredom, they tend to dissipate their energies in negative ways. They are generally in classes which include unmotivated readers as well as those with severe reading handicaps. The able readers become bored and disruptive when remedial skills are stressed and the disabled readers exhibit negative behavior when content and motivation are emphasized. The most concerned and effective teachers find even the simplest secondary materials often ineffectual for instruction and many, in desperation, resort to useless "busy work" to keep order. The anti-intellectual atmosphere of such classrooms tends to disillusion the most idealistic teachers. A unique core program, stressing reading improvement as well as content and motivation, was developed to deal with this problem on the junior level.

PURPOSES: (1) to improve reading skills of non-academic students and encourage positive attitudes toward learning in the content areas; and (2) to provide an atmosphere in which academically-alienated students of different racial and ethnic groups can be brought to a deeper understanding of their differences and a sense of identification with the school.

SUBJECTS: The 45 students in the program were drawn from a population of 602 high school juniors normally scheduled for the slow academic track. About 85 per cent of this population is Caucasian and comes from advantaged

middle-to-high socio-economic backgrounds while the remaining 15 per cent is Black and Caucasian and comes from disadvantaged low socio-economic backgrounds.

DESCRIPTION: The year-long program was conducted by a social studies teacher, an English teacher, and a reading specialist during two consecutive 43-minute periods of the school day. Students were pre- and post-tested with alternate forms of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Survey F. In September, the reading specialist also tested each student individually with an informal reading inventory in order to diagnose weaknesses and estimate strengths in reading skills as well as to verify reading levels indicated by pre-tests. While individual testing continued, the content area teachers oriented students to the program. They stressed the importance of reading proficiency and motivated individuals to seek help willingly when reading problems were the cause of poor academic performance. When testing was completed, students were divided into one group of 20 students who read on or above the eighth-grade level and another group of 25 students who read on or below the seventh-grade level. The better readers were taught by the English teacher during the first class period and the social studies teacher during the second. The procedure was reversed for the disabled readers. The reading specialist then culled small groups of disabled readers from the group of poorer readers for intensive help.

Students met four days a week for instruction and were free on the fifth day to pursue independent projects. The break in the week seemed to have a salutary effect on student morale and provided time for the teachers to plan the week's activities and discuss the progress of individual students. The entire group convened for activities such as films, trips, speakers, and educational games. The themes, coordinated in the program, covered such topics as immigration, minority groups, law, and psychology of the

teenager. The reading specialist provided multilevel materials for the social studies class and did readabilities on books selected for the English class so that material difficulty could be geared to student needs.

One highlight of the year was the videotaping of a student production entitled "Curse of the Dead." Fictional characters such as Dracula, Blackula, Frankenstein, and a variety of vampires achieved new dimensions with scripts written and acted by teenagers. The most significant outcome of this activity, however, was the development of comraderie among heretofore hostile individuals of different racial and ethnic groups.

A six-week showing of a videotape of War and Peace provided a most rewarding educational experience for the students. Each segment was treated as a directed listening activity by the reading specialist who identified foreign names, clarified difficult concepts, and established with the students a purpose for viewing each reel. Guiding questions were posed to help students follow the intricate threads of the story line. These and other questions were subsequently used to deepen comprehension and insight. These students were intellectually seduced by this film because it had elements of a soap opera. Their discussions revealed a new understanding of how literature is related to life and individuals to historical events. Students gained insight into the class structure of pre-Napoleonic society and the role of cultural revolution and war in evolving a new society with different parameters.

EVALUATION: Post-testing indicated that 17 of the better readers and 10 of the disabled readers had advanced one stanine. All of the disabled readers made positive gains, although the better readers made significantly greater gains than the disabled readers. The better readers seemed to benefit most from being more homogeneously grouped. These results were limited by the fact that many students were unmotivated when pre-tested and may not have put forth their best efforts.

Responses to a questionnaire at the end of the year indicated that students unanimously wanted the program introduced on the tenth and twelfth grades. All but four wanted to continue with the same individuals the following year. Most students felt that they had learned more than they had in other classes.

There were indications that students had developed an identity with the program. Those who had formerly been "chronic absentees" attended regularly and those previously characterized as "behavior problems" were cooperative and responsive in the non-threatening atmosphere of the program. Teachers noted a marked improvement in reading ability and student attitudes toward reading. They also noted a lessening of racial and ethnic tensions.